

## **How do I talk with my family about my Life Plan?**

### **Imagine...**

*You have a friend who was hospitalized and unable to make decisions.*

*Reflecting on your friend's situation, you begin to think about yourself. Who would make your decisions?*

*Who would be at your bedside? Talking with the doctors? Making decisions that determine how you will live?*

*Those decisions could include a variety of treatments – stomach feeding tube, surgery, dialysis, breathing machine and many others.*

*You say to yourself, "I need to plan now and talk to my family now!"*

### **So, how do I start this conversation?**

These discussions can be difficult and although we think we know how our family members will respond, research has shown that family members are often not prepared for these serious conversations. Here are some ways to better prepare yourself and your family for life planning discussions.

- Choose the right time and the right place. Pick a time that is not rushed and when conversation among family members flows easily. Consider a place where there is privacy and that gives you a sense of comfort and freedom to express your thoughts.

Examples of right time and place:

- Starting the conversation during a car trip or a walk
- Some families have held "life planning dinners" where everyone comes knowing that the topic of conversation will be life planning
- Others have simply found that the right time at the right place just happens.
- Here are some suggestions for getting started:
  - Tell your family about the benefit that your company is offering you. Tell them you were looking at the *Five Wishes* document and realized that you needed their input and their understanding of your wishes to continue.
  - Start with a story of someone else's experience. Using a story that points to the difficulties when plans are not put in place may encourage family members to want to discuss this matter.
  - Start by telling your family members that you need their help. Encouraging their help in the making of your decisions is helpful to you. It helps you make clear in your mind what you want AND it helps make clear in your family's minds what you want.

- Maybe you saw a TV show of a woman on life-support and the family was arguing about what to do. Tell them it got you thinking about your own wishes and that you want them to know. Point out that this will save them a great deal of stress during a time of crisis.
- Explain your motivation and reasons for discussing your life planning.  
These things might be important to you to include in this discussion.
  - Consider including your beliefs about life and death and your wishes and desires for how you want to live well.
  - Don't forget to express your desire to give your loved ones a gift for the future, explaining that a life plan guides them in making choices during a very stressful time.
  - Express your belief that the time to discuss this is now, not when you are in a health care crisis.
- What if I don't get to finish the conversation?  
Most of the time, these conversations cannot be completed at one time. Serious decisions need time for reflection, thought, and further discussion later on. Be gentle but be persistent. Don't let the conversation drop – set a time to discuss again, bring it up again, or plan another uninterrupted time to discuss your wishes. Remember, your goal is to plan for the future – your future!
- What if my family won't join in this conversation?  
Discussions on life planning are often avoided. These talks are very personal and may bring out strong emotions. And often, family members want to avoid these conversations out of fear: fear of talking about sickness in someone they love, fear of imagining their own serious illness, fear of losing someone they love.

Continue to emphasize that living well requires planning and that this planning is important to you. Giving your family member time to face their fears is helpful. Acknowledging you may have had similar fears may lessen theirs. Stress to your family members that you care too much about them to forget about this topic.